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## Supporting self-evaluation: helping language learners take control of the assessment process.

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# **Supporting self-evaluation: helping learners take control of the assessment process**

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# Outline

**Focus: exercising autonomy in the assessment process rather than assessment of autonomy**

**Autonomy and assessment – key issues**

**Distance learning context**

**Framework for critical reflection and decision-making**

**Learner and teacher reactions**

# **Autonomy and assessment: key issues**



**Range of definitions, terminology and interpretations (Hurd, 2005)**

**Two concepts key to exercise of responsibility and control of learning: critical reflection and decision-making (Holec, 1980; Van Lier, 1996; Little, 2003)**

**Agreement on importance for educational programmes of developing autonomy (Sinclair, 2000)**

# **Autonomy and assessment: key issues**



**Efforts to encourage autonomous learning often not backed up through the assessment process**

**Exhortations to autonomy contradicted by assessment strategies that ‘value dependency’ (Brockbank and McGill, 1998) and undermined by lack of ‘constructive alignment’ (Biggs, 1999)**

**Distance learning is no exception**

# **Autonomy and assessment: key issues**



**Concerns about learners' capacity for and experience of critical reflection (e.g. Candy, 1991; Ushioda, 1996; Benson, 2001)**

**Learners find it time-consuming; expectations based on previous learning experience**

**Importance of capacity to self-monitor and self-assess, but how easy is this for language learners?**

**Teacher reluctance to 'let go' (Little, 1995)**

# **Autonomy and assessment: key issues**



**Possible to overcome reluctance by linking reflection to assessment?**

**‘Recipe following’? (Boud and Walker, 1993)**

**Importance of dialogue and interaction in development of reflection and autonomy  
Benson and Lor (1998)**

**Difficulty of reflecting alone (Newton, 1996),  
need for a ‘skilled helper’ (Brookfield, 1987) and  
‘pedagogical dialogue’ (Little, 1995)**

# Contextual background



**Focus on ‘learning to learn’ and nature of ‘graduateness’**

**UK Quality Assurance Agency benchmark statement Languages and Related Studies: a graduate in this discipline will be expected to be an ‘effective and self-aware independent learner’ (2002: 13, section 6.3)**

**Generic support developed for other disciplines in OU not appropriate for languages**



# Framework for critical reflection



**Guidance through the stages of Kolb's learning cycle/spiral (1984)**

- **Concrete experience (e.g. performance in assessment)**
- **Reflective observation on concrete experience**
- **Abstract conceptualisation (formulation of priorities and action plans)**
- **Further concrete experience**

# Framework for critical reflection



**Skills audit**

**Self-assessment sheet**

**Reflection sheet**

**Tips sheet**

- Returning to the experience
- Attending to feelings
- Re-evaluating the experience (Boud et al, 1985)

**Skills sheets**

# **Teacher and learner experiences**



**In-depth interviews with teachers (n=17)  
and learners (n=31)**

**Recorded and transcribed**

**Qualitative analysis**

**How do teachers feel the process impacts on their workload?**

**How do learners feel the process impacts on their study and assignments?**

# Teacher responses



**Made work easier rather than harder**

**More focused, relevant feedback based on learner goals and action rather than assumptions**

**Increased dialogue with learners**

**Self-assessment sheets *enormously helpful* leading to *a real dialogue focused on the assignment work***

**Noted increased learner reflection**

***they are really looking at their language development in a more critical way***

# Learner responses



**Identified specific priorities**

**Some evidence of greater degree of critical reflection and decision-making**

**More satisfaction with study**

**Value of investing time in the process**

- of course it takes time, but it saves time overall through sharper focus***
- I don't think it takes a lot of time, especially if it becomes part of your routine. It was helpful. I felt I was working on things that needed to be worked on and not wasting time, so it was time well spent***

# Learner responses



## Increased dialogue with teacher

- *It actually made me sit down and think, now what has the tutor said this time? It really brought it home more consciously, even positive things, for example, where I thought it was quite good, she did too, great!*
- *Sometimes I was pleasantly surprised that she disagreed with me....that something I thought I'd done abominably, she thought I'd done quite well*

# Continuing concerns



**Difficulties with self-assessment: the need for experience and practice**

- *I've been used to either selling myself, or criticising, evaluating what I do*
- *It got easier as we went on through the course*

**Difficulties with the format**

- *I find this very difficult to sort of talk to myself in writing....it's just that there's various sorts of things that don't really work for me*

# Continuing concerns



The importance of the affective side of assessment

- *when I got the first comment about my accent, it stopped me talking for quite a while*
- *it's a good idea this pat on the back when you have done something right...you can very easily put yourself down*

Writing things down made sure that you *really look carefully and analyse the comments* and didn't just *rush on*



# Continuing concerns



**Used from 2000-2010 – but by third of learners at most**

**Self-assessment guidance incorporated into study materials**

**Framework incorporated in study guides**

**Reflection tasks included in some assignments**

**Learners weigh up benefits in personal context**

# Remaining questions



**Could compulsory use of the framework in assessment encourage learners to develop the ‘habit’ of critical reflection and decision-making?**

**Or would it simply encourage them to ‘play the game’? Does that matter?**

**Or should we be encouraging informed choice and be ready to accept strategic decisions?**

**Are there more creative ways to assess evidence of critical reflection and informed decision-making?**

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